NEWS ANALYSIS NO. 1-0015 JANUARY 22, 1976
CHRIS KERN

FORD AND MUSKIE ON THE STATE OF THE UNION

ANNCR:

AMERICA'S DEMOCRATIC PARTY HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO REPLY ON WEDNESDAY TO PRESIDENT FORD'S STATE OF THE UNION SPEECH. THE DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP IN CONGRESS, RESPONDING TO AN INVITATION FROM THE PRIVATE TELEVISION NETWORKS, CHOSE SENATOR EDMUND MUSKIE TO ACT AS SPOKESMAN FOR THE PARTY IN A TELEVISED RESPONSE. THE FORD AND MUSKIE SPEECHES HAVE HELPED SET THE TONE OF BOTH PARTIES' APPEALS TO THE VOTERS, AND HERE'S CHRIS KERN'S ANALYSIS.

VOICE:

IT'S BEEN CLEAR FOR QUITE SOME TIME THAT THE ECONOMY IS THE DOMINANT CONCERN OF THE AMERICAN VOTER IN THIS ELECTION YEAR, AND BOTH THE FORD AND MUSKIE SPEECHES DEALT PRIMARILY WITH THE SUBJECT. THE ISSUE IS REAL AND IMMEDIATE. THE AVERAGE AMERICAN MAY NOT BE SURE HOW HE FEELS ABOUT ANGOLA OR THE CIA, BUT HE KNOWS HOW HE FEELS ABOUT INFLATION AND THE THREAT OF UNEMPLOYMENT. THINGS COULD BE WORSE, BUT THEY CERTAINLY COULD BE BETTER TOO, AND IT'S A SAFE BET THAT THE CANDIDATE AND THE PARTY THAT CAN BEST CONVINCE THE VOTERS THAT HE OR IT KNOWS HOW TO MAKE THINGS BETTER IS GOING TO OCCUPY THE WHITE HOUSE IN 1977.

NEITHER PRESIDENT FORD NOR SENATOR MUSKIE HAD MUCH NEW TO OFFER AS AN APPROACH TO ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. MR. FORD EMPHASIZED THE TRADITIONAL REPUBLICAN VIRTUES OF SELF-RELIANCE, LESS GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE AND A BALANCED BUDGET. MR. MUSKIE EMPHASIZED THE TRADITIONAL DEMOCRATIC VIRTUES OF SOCIAL WELFARE, GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP AND SPENDING FOR

ECONOMIC STIMULATION. MR. FORD THINKS THAT WASHINGTON SHOULD GIVE THE INDIVIDUAL CITIZEN A BETTER CHANCE TO ACHIEVE A BETTER LIFE, NOT TRY TO IMPROSE IT ON HIM. MR. MUSKIE THINKS THAT WASHINGTON HAS TO FILL THE GAPS THAT PRIVATE ACTION LEAVES BEHIND. THE BATTLE IS MOST SHARPLY DRAWN ON UNEMPLOYMENT. MR. FORD THINKS INDUSTRY CAN PROVIDE THE NECESSARY JOBS WITH PROPER ENCOURAGEMENT FROM THE GOVERNMENT. MR. MUSKIE THINKS THE GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE TO PROVIDE THE JOBS ITSELF.

THIS IS AN OLD DEBATE -- ONE THAT PRECEDED THE 1976 CAMPAIGN AND IS SURE TO SURVIVE IT. BOTH APPROACHES HAVE MERIT AND NEITHER ONE IS A SURE CURE FOR THIS COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC ILLS. MR. FORD'S PLAN IS DESIGNED TO PROVIDE LONG-TERM GROWTH WITHOUT SHORT-TERM INFLATION; MR. MUSKIE'S TO PROVIDE SHORT-TERM RELIEF EVEN AT THE RISK OF HIGHER PRICES IN THE FUTURE. MR. FORD HAS THE TRADITIONAL ADVANTAGE OF THE INCUMBENT. HE HAS A PROGRAM THAT IS DETAILED AND DESIGNED TO BE PUT INTO IMMEDIATE EFFECT. MR. MUSKIE AND THE DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES FOR PRESIDENT -- DESPITE THE DIFFERENCES AMONG THEM -- SHARE THE TRADITIONAL ADVANTAGE OF THE CHALLENGER. THEY CAN CHOOSE THE POINTS THEY WANT TO CRITICIZE WITHOUT COMING UP WITH A COORDINATED PLAN.

THE VOTERS WHO WILL ULTIMATELY DECIDE BETWEEN THE TWO APPROACHES DON'T HAVE ANY MORE ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM THAN THE POLITICIANS WHO HAVE TO PROVIDE PROPOSED SOLUTIONS. BUT AT LEAST THEY ARE FAMILIAR WITH WHAT IS BEING OFFERED AND THEY HAVE THE PREROGATIVE OF THE MAJORITY OF CHOOSING THE RISKS THEY WANT TO TAKE.

GH/PM